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THE AGE OF INDIFFERENCE:

A Study of Young Americans And How They View The News

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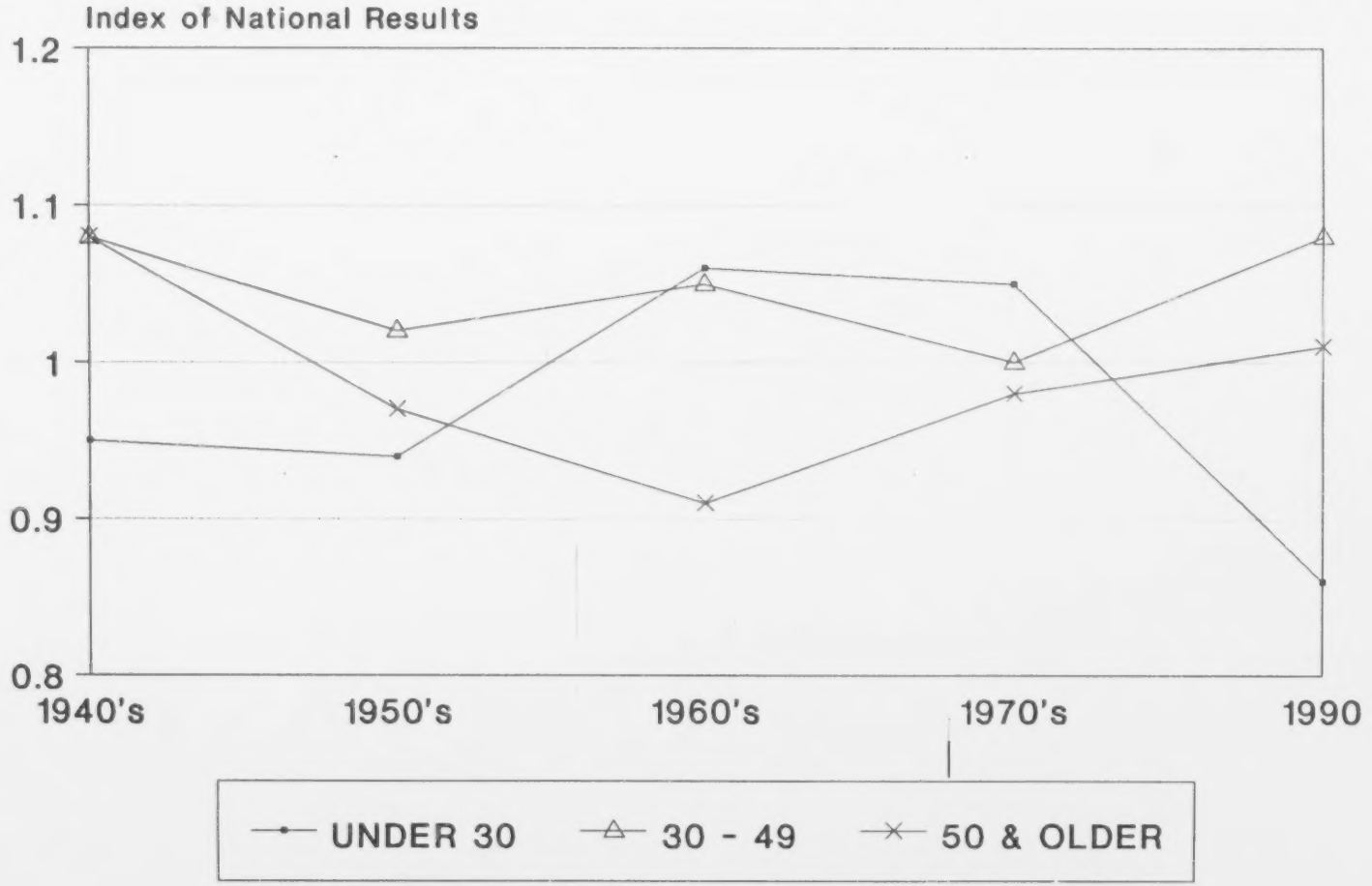
INFORMATION LEVEL 1944 - 1990

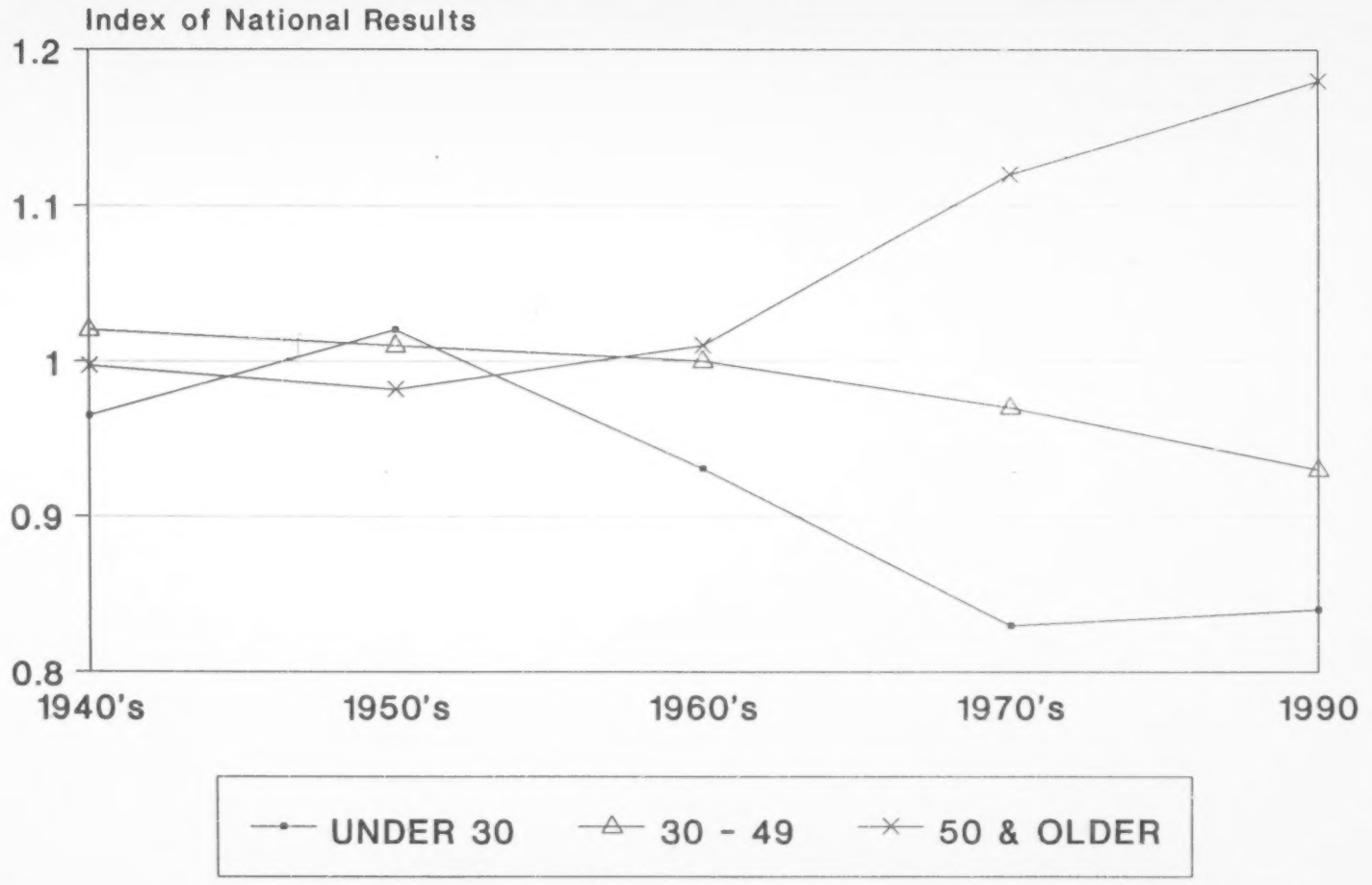
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT NEWS EVENTS & PEOPLE



DIFFERENCES RELATIVE TO NATIONWIDE FINDINGS

NEWS ATTENTIVENESS 1941 - 1990

ATTENTIVENESS TO MAJOR NEWS STORIES



DIFFERENCES RELATIVE TO NATIONWIDE FINDINGS

THE AGE OF INDIFFERENCE

In the days when Lyndon B. Johnson was President, the phrase "generation gap" summed up the contrasting political and social values of young Americans and their elders. Today, a new but different generation gap exists.

A major comparative examination of what young people know, what they pay attention to, and what media they use reveals a generation that knows less, cares less, and reads newspapers less. It is also a generation that votes less and is less critical of its leaders and institutions than young people in the past.

With the advent of satellite technology, CNN, and ever-longer local news broadcasts, one might expect that young people would know more than ever before. But a year-long series of surveys by the Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press shows that people under 30 registered less interest than their elders in 92 of 110 major news stories. When the list of news stories is limited to those dealing with issues, government or public policy, the generation gap is even wider.

An analysis of public opinion polls from the 1940's to the present day finds that the lagging interest and information level among today's young people is a departure from historical patterns. Over most of the past five decades, younger members of the public have been at least as well informed as older people. In 1990, that is no longer the case. Times Mirror's research finds that young people were 20% less likely than middle-aged and older people to give the correct answer to 74 questions on current events.

Those under 30 know less than younger people once did, and they are less interested in what's happening in the larger world around them. Social scientists and pollsters have long recognized that younger people have usually been somewhat less attuned to politics and serious issues. But the difference now is more striking than ever before. Surveys conducted over the past 40 years show that through the 1960's young Americans were as interested as their elders in the large news events of their times. The Army-McCarthy hearings, Watergate, and Vietnam were stories followed closely by young and old alike. However, since the mid-seventies young people have shown much less interest in most news, including the biggest stories with the most far-reaching implications.

The young adults of the mid-seventies, those who came of age during the Vietnam - Watergate period, were the generation that created the news and information gap, and the next generation then widened it considerably. Although people now in their thirties and forties are better informed than the under-30's group, they show a similar lack of appetite for hard news. The Roper organization first recorded this lack of interest in politics and policy among the "baby-boom" generation in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal of the mid-1970's. Thus, while age 30 is the brightest line of

demarcation for the knowledge gap, the loss of interest in the news extends to people all the way to the age of 50.

The end of the Cold War and the political transformation of Eastern and Central Europe have failed to engage the vast majority of young people. In some instances, the level of interest among young people in Eastern European stories has been less than one third of what it has been for people over fifty. The interest level of middle-aged people has consistently fallen between these extremes.

These patterns are having far-reaching effects on American politics and the news media. The consequences of the news and information generation gap are reflected in declining rates of voting, and demographic studies show that young people have buoyed the popularity of the new lighter media forms -- from ***People*** magazine to ***A Current Affair*** -- to the point that even some more traditional media have adopted a softer news focus in response to diminishing levels of interest in hard news.

The ultimate irony of the Times Mirror findings is that the Information Age has spawned such an uninformed and uninvolved population. Compared to a 50 year old, the average 30 year old is much more likely to use a computer, to have attended college and even to say that he or she is currently reading a book. But this new research reveals startling differences in what the generations know and care about.

	AGE GROUPS		
	18-29	30-49	50 and older
Attended college	43	51	29
Currently reading book	38	40	33
Uses a computer	34	31	9
Correctly identified Jim Wright	23	43	47
Knows of Canal Treaty	28	37	42
Knows U.S./Lithuania policy	40	48	52
Voted in 1988*	36	54	68

* Voting rate data based on U.S. Census age categorizations: 18-24, 25-44, 45 & older.

THE NEWS AND INFORMATION GAP

DON'T ASK ANYONE UNDER THIRTY

By any reckoning, the political changes occurring in the Soviet bloc countries are among the most important developments of this half century. Yet at no point in the past twelve revolutionary months has a majority of young Americans followed news about these events very closely. Even at its most dramatic moment, the opening of the Berlin Wall in November, 1989, only 42% of those under 30 were drawn to this visually rich, emotional story. A month later, less than half that number (19%) said they were really interested in news about the violent end of the Ceausescus and communism in Romania. Since that time, most major news from Eastern and Central Europe has engaged only about one in four young Americans, and sometimes it has attracted as few as one in twenty.

Among Americans older than 30, levels of attentiveness to these stories have been appreciably higher, although still quite low given the import of the news. As measured in monthly surveys conducted by Times Mirror, 58% of those over fifty years of age followed very closely the opening of the Berlin Wall, while 34% were engaged by the news from Romania in December.

The oldest Americans, those over fifty, have expressed the most interest in each episode of the decline of Communism while the under 30's group has shown considerably less. This pattern is evident for almost all news that deals with politics, issues or public policy. The core audience for such stories are older people, with younger people (30 and under) far less likely to be interested.

Middle-aged people (30 to 49) have a greater appetite for most news subjects than do young people, with a single exception. When it comes to news about domestic and international politics, people in their thirties and forties are almost as likely to be tuned out as are people in their twenties. Oliver North, Jim Wright, the HUD scandal and even the Supreme Court decision on flag burning were subjects that generated much less interest among young people than among those over fifty years of age. But middle-aged Americans were only marginally more interested in these stories than their younger counterparts. The same pattern is apparent for news about the changing face of communism. Older people have been following those stories much more closely than either of the two succeeding generations.

	AGE GROUPS		
	18-29	30-49	50 and older
Average percent following "very closely" major stories*			
Washington politics (34 stories)	19	22	31
The changing face of communism (22 stories)	19	22	29

* Source - Times Mirror News Interest Index (March, 1990)

The news and information generation gap is not limited to politics and policy. To a considerable extent it embraces almost all forms of news.

When a Colombian airliner crashed outside New York City, killing scores of people, 47% of those 50 and older followed the news of that tragedy very closely, but only 18% of those under 30 did. Similarly, when Marine Lieutenant Colonel Higgins was hanged by Arab terrorists, only 40% of young people followed the news, but 59% of those over fifty followed it very closely. Even Hurricane Hugo, with no imaginable generational overtones, had less impact on the young than on older people.

News about major sports events is the single category of news that is consistently as appealing to young adults as to their elders. The Super Bowl, the baseball and football playoffs, and the World Series all attracted equally large audiences among young and old.

	AGE GROUPS		
	18-29	30-49	50 and older
Average percent following "very closely"*			
Social issues (8 stories)	20	25	31
Financial news (7 stories)	17	25	25
Physical/Science (12 stories)	42	47	55
Sports (7 stories)	27	22	27
Military/Terrorism (12 stories)	34	37	42

* Source - Times Mirror News Interest Index (March, 1990)

Stories of death and destruction on a large scale -- the invasion of Panama, the explosion of the Challenger, air strikes against Libya -- tend to draw almost as many young people as older people. News that has a youth focus or connections to youth culture draws relatively high interest. The crushing of the student revolt in China, stories about the 20th anniversary of Woodstock, and the freeing of Nelson Mandela (whose cause has been adopted by prominent rock musicians) had as much appeal among young people as among older and middle-aged people.

But interest in many of these issue-related stories is short-lived. Although 46% of young people followed the Tiananmen Square story closely, interest in the major follow-up stories was far less evident among young people than among older people. The debate in Washington about allowing Chinese students to remain in the U.S. after their visas expired was followed very closely by just 10% of Americans under 30 years of age but by twice as many over the age of thirty. While the invasion of Panama played to equally large young and old audiences, news about the drug wars in Latin America and the abortive coup attempt against Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega in October, 1989 had a much smaller audience among the young.

ATTENTIVENESS TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF NEWS BY AGE

(1986 - 1990)*

	AGE GROUPS		
	18-29	30-49	50 and older
Large Scale News About			
Life, Death and Destruction			
Explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger (July 86)	78	80	81
U.S. invasion of Panama (Jan 90)	62	60	61
U.S. air strikes against Libya (July 86)	57	62	56
Nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union (July 86)	42	49	46
Major International News			
Opening of the Berlin Wall between East and West Germany (Nov 89)	42	47	58
Political upheaval in China (July 89)	46	49	46
Failed coup attempt against Panamanian strongman Noriega (Oct 89)	19	32	34
The Gorbachev/Bush summit (Dec 89)	11	14	31
Political changes taking place in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany and other countries of Eastern and Central Europe (March 90)	18	16	28
Flight of East German refugees to West Germany (Oct 89)	19	32	38
War between the Colombian government and the major drug traffickers (Sept 89)	27	36	38
Political changes taking place in the Soviet Union (Feb 90)	8	12	17

	18-29	30-49	50 and older
Domestic Political			
The Democratic convention (Aug 88)	22	23	39
The Republican convention (Aug 88)	21	21	34
Passage in Congress of a bill to bail out ailing savings and loan institutions (Aug 89)	12	25	36
The scandal involving HUD (July 89)	9	13	21
Ethics committee's investigation of Speaker of the House Jim Wright (May 89)	5	12	24
Bush administration's plan to deal with this country's drug problem (Sept 89)	32	39	48
Sentencing of Oliver North (July 89)	33	33	46
Sports			
The World Series (Oct 88)	31	26	36
Post-season baseball playoffs (Oct 89)	22	17	23
The World Series (Nov 89)	25	21	25
The NFL playoffs (Jan 90)	39	26	21
The Super Bowl (Feb 90)	27	22	18
Stories with a Youth Focus or Connection			
Supreme Court's hearing of arguments in a Missouri abortion case (May 89)	26	26	23
Stories about the 20th anniversary of the Woodstock Music Festival (Aug 89)	13	12	4
Freeing of jailed black South African leader Nelson Mandela (March 90)	33	24	34
Attempts to change the abortion laws (Dec 89)	41	33	33
Supreme Court's decision on abortion (July 89)	47	45	48

* Source - Times Mirror News Interest Index (March, 1990)

Abortion A Notable Exception

Abortion is the only serious news issue that has consistently engaged people between 18 and 30 to the same degree as it has older people -- a concern that reflects its direct bearing on the personal lives of young people.

In July, news about the Supreme Court's ***Webster*** decision was followed very closely by 47% of young people, compared to 48% among those 30 and older - a surprising outcome for a serious story. Even more unusual was the response to subsequent stories about forthcoming abortion battles in various states. These stories drew more attention from young adults than from older ones (41% vs 33%).

Abortion notwithstanding, an overall examination of the surveys conducted by Times Mirror reveals a younger generation with less curiosity about news of all sorts, and one with an especially small appetite for the most serious and complicated of issues. Robert Pitman, the creator of MTV, the electronic icon of this generation, wrote recently in the ***New York Times*** that in developing MTV he took into account that the post-Watergate generation processes information differently: "It can do its homework, talk on the phone, and listen to the radio all at the same time ... And at the end of the evening it all makes sense."

That may be. But what it chooses to follow -- and what it absorbs from what it follows -- is strikingly different from that of today's older generation and preceding generations of young people.

Public opinion polls have measured public attention to the major events and issues of the day since the 1940's. These questions were not asked on a systematic basis, as they are now by the Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press. But they were posed with sufficient frequency to get some sense of the character of public attentiveness over the years.

It is clear that the news and information generation gap is a product of our own time. The results of 16 individual measures of public attentiveness from 1944 to 1968 demonstrate only small differences between age groups. Over those years, the interest of younger people was less than 5% below that of interest in the population at large. In the forties, political debates in Washington and election news had as large an audience among the under-30's as among older people. In the fifties, the Army-McCarthy hearings generated as much interest among the young as among older people. In the 60's, as many young people as older people said they were following the war in Vietnam very closely.

In the 70's, Watergate was of equal interest to young and old. But soon thereafter, surveys by the Roper Organization began to show diminished interest in current affairs among younger people. As early as 1974, young people (who are today's middle-aged people) expressed considerably less interest in serious news subjects, just as the successor generation does. In 1974-1975, Roper found Gerald Ford, OPEC, the upcoming presidential race, financial troubles of the city of New York, and many other personalities and issues of the day failing to engage the close attention of young adults.

ATTENTIVENESS TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF NEWS

1940's - 1970's

	18-29	30-49	50 and older
1940's			
Heard or read about the most recent disagreement over the tax bill between the President and Congress (1944)	71	76	72+
Heard of the Good Neighbor policy (1944)	82	79	71+
Heard or read about the recent attack by Senator Butler and others on how the Government is wasting money in Latin America (1944)	36	50	51+
Heard or read about Dewey's campaign speeches (1944)	73	75	76+
Heard or read about Roosevelt's campaign speeches (1944)	78	82	81+
1950's			
Heard or read about the Congressional investigation or the quarrel between Senator McCarthy and Army Secretary Stevens (1954)	72	79	78++
Heard or read about the recent change of leaders in the Russian government (1955)	70	69	64+++
Heard or read about the islands of Quemoy and Matsu, near the mainland of China (1955)	57	54	53+++
Showed a great deal of interest in:			
The United Nations Organization (1955)	18	21	22+++
The Formosa Situation (1955)	41	35	34+++
The rearmament of Germany (1955)	27	30	33+++
The hydrogen bomb tests (1955)	49	48	40+++
Our relations with Central and South America (1955)	18	25	28+++

	18-29	30-49	50 and older
1960's			
Followed the war in Vietnam very closely (1966)	33	32	35++
Heard or read about the South Vietnamese elections (1967)	65	72	71++
Heard or read about the Ford Motor Company's settlement with the United Auto Workers Union in respect to a guaranteed annual wage (1968)	64	70	71++
1970's			
Showed a great deal of interest in Watergate (1973)	37	30	33++++
Followed news about government proposals for getting the economy moving again closely (1975)	54	*64	**63++++
Followed news about proposals for ways to cut U.S. oil and gasoline use closely (1975)	55	*60	**63++++
Followed news about relations between the U.S. and the oil producing Arab nations closely (1975)	44	*48	**57++++
Followed news about President Ford and his administration closely (1975)	29	*46	**60++++
Followed news about possible candidates for our next president closely (1975)	26	*36	**44++++
Followed news about the economic problems of New York City closely (1975)	13	*17	**22++++
Followed news about the matter of pardon for former President Nixon closely (1975)	59	*60	**66++++

* Based on ages 30-44.
** Based on ages 45+.

\+ Office of Public Opinion Research.
++ The Gallup Poll.
+++ The National Opinion Research Center.
++++ The Roper Organization.

In 1990, the corollary to flagging interest in the news among today's youth is a sharp decline in the younger generation's ***knowledge*** of what's happening in the nation and in the world.

Survey results from the ***1940's through the 1970's*** consistently demonstrates that younger people knew as much as -- if not more than -- older members of the population.

In sum, generational differences in interest in serious news seem to have begun in the seventies after Watergate, but the information gap is a product of the current generation of our young adult citizens.

Helmut Who?

The change is clearly demonstrated in the results of two surveys conducted 25 years apart in which cross sections of the American public were asked to identify the Chancellor of West Germany. In 1964, when Gallup asked a nationally representative sample of Americans who Ludwig Erhardt was, 38% knew the correct answer. There were no significant differences by age. Thirty-five percent of those under 30 gave the correct answer, as did 40% of the 30-49 year olds and 36% of those 50 and older.

Twenty-five years later in a Times Mirror survey, only 30% of the total sample identified current West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, despite his recent and unusually high level of exposure in the American news media. Most of the falloff occurred among the under-30 segment of the sample. Just 21% of today's young people know that Kohl is the Chancellor of West Germany, while 33% of those aged 30 years and older know who Kohl is.

The monthly Times Mirror survey also measures the degree to which Americans grasp important news concepts. Compared to older people, those under 30 are less likely to know basic facts about current events, such as which side was victorious in the election in Nicaragua, or that the U.S. is scheduled to turn over control of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians, or that Mikhail Gorbachev now favors a multi-party system in the Soviet Union.

NEWS INFORMATION LEVEL BY AGE*

	AGE GROUPS		
	18-29	30-49	50 and older
Correctly Identified the Following People:			
Jim Wright	23	43	47
William J. Bennett	12	27	29
Thomas Foley	8	13	20
Richard Cheney	6	13	18
Corazon Aquino	53	68	67
Helmut Kohl	21	34	32
Vaclav Havel	8	14	18
Events			
Knew that the Soviet Union was encouraging the political changes taking place in Eastern and Central Europe	33	47	44
Knew Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu was tried and executed	59	74	74
Knew that in the future the U.S. will turn over the control of the Panama Canal to Panama	28	37	42
Knew that there are more threats to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's political position than there were a year ago	45	56	47
Knew Violeta Chamorro won the Presidential election in Nicaragua	52	64	69

* Source - Times Mirror News Interest Index (March, 1990)

The changing relationship of education to news and policy information is a puzzling issue because the decline of interest and information has occurred in the face of sharply increasing levels of formal education. In the 1940's, the percentage of college graduates was half as great as it is today. But a historical analysis of public opinion surveys shows that the level of education is no longer as good an indicator as it once was for what different segments of the public know.

From the 1940's through the 1970's, college graduates were at least ***50%*** more likely than the average person to correctly identify a person in the news or know about an important occurrence that had been in the news. Today, the difference is appreciably lower ***(37%)***. And so it is up and down the education scale. In the early 40's, the typical high school graduate was ***20%*** more likely than the average respondent to get the answer right. In 1990, a high school graduate is ***10% less*** likely than the national average to give the correct response to a question about the news.

RELATIVE DIFFERENCES IN NEWS INFORMATION LEVELS BETWEEN EDUCATION GROUPS

	College Graduate	College Incomplete	High School Graduate	Less than High School
1990	*1.37	1.10	.90	.67
1970's	1.57	1.3	1.07	.69
1960's	1.53	1.3	1.09	.71
1950's	1.57	1.39	1.18	.77
1940's	1.55	1.4	1.22	.88

*Differences between results of news information questions for various education categories relative to nationwide findings.

NEWS INFORMATION LEVEL BY AGE

1940's - 1970's

	National	18-29	30-49	50 and older
1940's				
Knew Harry Truman (1944)	68	60	68	69+++
Knew Norman Thomas (1944)	49	33	51	52+++
Knew Henry Wallace (1944)	79	71	79	82+++
Knew that coal is where most war plants got their heat and power from (1944)	49	48	51	45+++
Knew in WWI Allies took land away from Germany that belonged to her before the war started (1944)	35	32	37	35+++
Knew Sydney Hillman (1944)	48	33	51	49+++
1950's				
Knew Chiang (1954)	65	67	65	61++
Knew Mao (1954)	21	18	24	18++
Knew Nehru (1954)	58	56	60	57++
Knew Robert Stevens (1954)	58	54	58	59++
Knew Ray Jenkins (1954)	37	33	38	36++
Knew John Adams (1954)	37	34	37	36++
Knew Roy Cohn (1954)	51	47	52	51++
1960's				
Knew that Congress under the Constitution, does not have the right to pass a law saying that groups who disagree with our form of government could not hold public meetings or make speeches (1964)	65	74	71	54+++++
Heard of the John Birch Society (1964)	77	82	77	73+++++

	National	18-29	30-49	50 and older
1960's				
Knew that Congress under the Constitution, does not have the right to pass a law saying that the President must be a man who believes in God (1964)	51	63	54	39+++++
Knew Earl Warren (1964)	62	66	62	59++
Knew U Thant (1964)	42	42	46	37++
Knew Charles de Gaulle (1964)	72	75	76	67++
Knew William Fulbright (1964)	30	25	31	32++
Knew Ludwig Erhardt (1964)	38	35	40	36++
Knew Sukarno (1964)	15	15	17	13++
Knew Ronald Reagan (1966)	75	79	82	68++
Knew Charles Percy (1967)	44	47	40	46++
Knew Nelson Rockefeller (1967)	84	81	85	84++
Knew Edmund Muskie (1968)	55	49	58	53++
1970's				
Knew Edmund Muskie (1972)	76	78	77	74++
Knew Ross Perot (1972)	14	17	15	12++
Knew John Lindsay (1972)	71	76	73	66++
Knew Ralph Nader (1972)	40	48	44	33++
Knew Henry Jackson (1972)	11	6	12	13++
Knew Harold Hughes (1972)	11	11	11	11++
Knew Birch Bayh (1972)	22	19	27	22++
Knew George McGovern (1972)	42	44	42	41++
Knew Sam Erwin (1973)	75	71	77	77++
Knew Howard Baker (1973)	53	46	58	54++

	National	18-29	30-49	50 and older
1970's				
Knew Daniel Inouye (1973)	46	41	47	47++
Knew Herman Talmadge (1973)	40	30	44	43++
Knew Taiwan has a non-communist government (1977)	44	44	44	44++
Knew Mainland China has a communist government (1977)	67	70	68	65++
Knew that the U.S. has a military or naval base on the island of Cuba (1977)	37	33	36	41++

\+ Office of Public Opinion Research.
++ The Gallup Poll.
+++ The National Opinion Research Center.
++++ The Roper Organization.
+++++ The University of Michigan.

LIGHTER NEWS - TASTES GOOD, LESS FILLING

MEDIA HABITS AND THE NEWS AND INFORMATION GAP

In 1965, George Gallup wrote to his newspaper clients that "the daily newspapers of the country continue to report the news of the day to many more millions of people than either television or radio." Gallup couched his conclusion with the admonition that "while the newspaper lead over television is substantial, the advantage has been reduced over the last eight years."

Twenty-five years later, television has long since eclipsed newspapers as the principal source of news for Americans, and the serious question for all media is how to hold on to audience in an environment in which serious news doesn't sell.

In-depth interviews last summer with top-level journalists from both print and broadcasting by Times Mirror researchers revealed that the issue of audience attraction -- and the blurring of the lines between news and entertainment in order to maintain audience -- has become a highly prominent issue among media people.

The generational differences in the public's appetite and aptitude for the news has had far-reaching effects on the news business. News with a lighter touch -- news programs that blend news with entertainment -- are produced in response to younger people's lower levels of interest in traditional news subjects.

Traditionally, news plays to an older audience. All those denture commercials on the network evening news are there for a reason. But, clearly, the typically "older" market for news has become even older.

The decline of regular newspaper readership, particularly among the young, seems at the root of the decline in the audience for serious news generally, and this "newspaper gap" is central to understanding the news and information gap.

Gallup drew his conclusions in 1965 by asking representative samples of the public if they had read a newspaper, watched the news on television, or listened to the news on radio yesterday. Newspapers led, with 71% saying they had seen one the day before, followed by radio at 58%, and TV with 55%. Twenty-five years later, the same questions were asked of a national sample. The results were similar for television (52%), but reports of day-before newspaper readership had plummeted to 43%.

This comparison probably overstates the decline of newspaper readership because Sunday readership was not considered in the more recent sample, and because simple "one-day recall" questions tend to favor television news, which airs at a variety of times throughout the day. The comparison, however, does illustrate a number of the critical changes about Americans and the news.

First, newspapers have been harder hit than electronic media by the declining American appetite for news. Secondly, all traditional news media have been affected by generational changes. In Gallup's 1965 survey, 67% of adults under 35 said they read a paper yesterday, just 4 percentage points below the national average. In 1990, 29% of young people made that claim, fully 14 percentage points below the average.

The same pattern is evident for television news, but the falloff has been appreciably less dramatic. Television news viewership among young people fell from 52% in 1965 to 41% in 1990.

NEWS CONSUMPTION YESTERDAY

	1965	1990
Read a Newspaper Yesterday:		
All Respondents 21 And Older*	71	44
Under 35	67	30
35-49	73	44
50+	74	55
Watched TV News Yesterday:		
All Respondents 21 And Older*	55	53
Under 35	52	41
35-49	52	49
50+	62	67
Listened to News on the Radio Yesterday:		
All Respondents 21 And Older*	58	53
Under 35	58	57
35-49	61	57
50+	55	48

* The 21 and older categorization is used here to be consistent with Gallup's report of 1965.

The comparison between the 1965 Gallup and the 1990 Times Mirror surveys reveals that the core audience for news is increasingly drawn from the ranks of older people. A.C. Nielsen's TV news viewership figures show the same thing. In 1965, the average minute of network evening news got a rating of *3.9* from the under-35 audience in a typical month. In a typical month in 1989, that rating had slipped to *3.2*.

The pattern is also evident in other forms of media. Those programs and publications which deal in hard news have the oldest audience profile. ***60 Minutes***, Sunday morning news programs, and ***The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour*** audiences are significantly older than the population at large. Personality magazines such as ***People***, and sensational quasi-news programs such as ***A Current Affair***, have younger profiles. News magazines are the only major news source trafficking heavily in policy and politics that do not have a distinctly older profile. It should be noted, however, that in recent years the news magazines have adopted a softer news focus.

The generational character of the market for hard news is seen in the age profile of those whom Times Mirror identifies as "serious news consumers". The monthly Times Mirror News Interest Index finds that about ***one in ten*** adults say they regularly use one or more of the following news sources: National Public Radio (NPR), ***MacNeil/Lehrer***, or quality magazines such as ***The Atlantic***, ***Harper's***, or ***The New Yorker***.

As one might expect, this market is much better educated than the population at large, with *41%* college graduates. But age is every bit as much a correlate as is education. In fact, a 45% majority of this audience segment is 50 years of age and older.

Changing media habits, particularly the sharp decline in newspaper readership, appear to be linked to the generational information gap. During the early and mid-1970's, a number of other trend lines were converging that mirrored the declining interest in serious news. In the age of Vietnam and Watergate, the public -- especially the young -- turned inward, away from politics and political involvement. At the same time, American education entered a period of crisis that was only to be fully appreciated in the 1980's.

According to a National Geographic Society survey, between 1947 and 1988, the percentage of young people who could find Europe on a world map fell from 45% to just 25%. That same study, which made multinational comparisons of geographic knowledge, reported:

> " Among 18-24 year olds the U.S. finished last. Moreover, the U.S. seems to be headed in the wrong direction. The U.S. is the only country in which young respondents (18-24) did not surpass the oldest (55 & older)."

SOFTER OPINIONS, FEWER VOTES

CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEWS AND INFORMATION GAP

Aspiring Democratic candidates for the presidency in both 1972 and 1988 faced uphill battles. But in 1988, Michael Dukakis found it far more difficult than George McGovern did in 1972 to successfully appeal to younger voters, who were historically more receptive to liberal candidates and more disposed to change. Dukakis faced a youthful electorate that was less politicized, less well-informed, and less critical of American institutions than most youthful voter groups of the past.

The political ramifications of a new generation gap based on information and political attentiveness were in full play in 1988. The politics of the 90's may well be further defined by how little younger Americans connect with events and personalities in the larger world around them.

Declining Political Awareness Among the Young

In January of 1988, only 42% of young people had heard of Michael Dukakis, compared with 57% of those over 30 years of age. This pattern was evident for all candidates, Democratic or Republican, except for those who were recognized nearly universally: George Bush and Jesse Jackson.

In the 1972 presidential campaign, there were no meaningful differences between age groups in familiarity with George McGovern or with any of his competitors, from Birch Bayh to Harold Hughes.

ABILITY TO IDENTIFY CANDIDATES IN 1988 ELECTION

(January 1988)

	18-29	30-49	50 and older
Pat Robertson	60	76	78
Bob Dole	69	82	85
Alexander Haig	74	80	82
Paul Simon	42	52	58
Michael Dukakis	42	56	58
Richard Gephardt	41	47	54
Bruce Babbitt	35	45	46

ABILITY TO IDENTIFY CANDIDATES IN 1972 ELECTION

(Spring 1971, Gallup Poll)

	18-29	30-49	50 and older
Edmund Muskie	78	77	74
John Lindsay	76	73	66
Henry Jackson	6	12	13
Harold Hughes	11	11	11
Birch Bayh	19	27	22
George McGovern	44	42	41

SOURCE: Times Mirror

The Voting Gap

The generation gap in news and information is playing out in politics in very significant ways. None is clearer or more significant than the decline in voting among the youngest segment of the electorate. After each national election, the U.S. Census conducts a survey of the voting-age population to determine the changing demographic character of those who vote and those who do not. After the 1972 election, the Census reported that 63% of its total sample reported voting, compared with 50% among those 18-24 years of age. By 1988, that same survey found that voting overall had declined to 57% -- and voting among those aged 18 to 24 had plummeted to 36%.

PERCENTAGE OF VOTING PARTICIPATION BY AGE
(U.S. CENSUS)

	1988	1984	1980	1976	1972
18-24 years	36	41	40	42	50
25-44 years	54	58	59	59	63
45-64 years	68	70	69	69	71
65 years and over	69	68	65	62	64

The Gallup Poll, which over the years has developed a highly accurate turnout prediction system, shows the same pattern in its unpublished data. Turnout has been decreasing for people of all ages since 1972, but the decline has been most precipitous among the youngest categories of voters.

The sharp decline in voter participation among the young corresponds to a tremendous change in the political intensity of young people. The political phrase-makers of 1972 said that the election was about "Acid, Abortion and Amnesty," and these were indeed among the issues that divided young voters and older voters two decades ago. While a *55%* majority of those under 30 favored a law allowing women to end a pregnancy during the first 3 months of her pregnancy, only *43%* of those 30 and older concurred. Similarly, near-majorities of younger voters favored amnesty for those who avoided the draft and also supported the idea of easing the restrictions on marijuana use. Both positions were overwhelmingly opposed by older voters. Thus did George McGovern lose to Richard Nixon by 14 percentage points but only

narrowly miss carrying the under-30 voting bloc (winning 48% of their vote, according to Gallup).

Four elections later, the symbolic issues of the campaign -- the flag, crime and Boston Harbor -- had no special impact on young voters one way or the other. Bush maintained the same margin among young voters as he achieved overall. The generational divide on matters of public concern has all but disappeared. Views on abortion, gun control, the death penalty and the invasion of Panama are not driven by age.

By the late 1980's, polls were not only showing limited generational differences in opinion on most issues; they also indicated an upbeat, uncritical tenor in the political values of the post-Watergate generation.

In 1987, Times Mirror conducted a major series of surveys to assess changes in the political landscape and to measure the basic political values that animate voter behavior. The survey found that each generation's values took on special coloration. Older people carried the stamp of the Depression and war years in their political beliefs. Middle-aged people held beliefs that showed the effects of Vietnam, Watergate and the social changes of the period in which they came of age. But the under-30 generation was distinguished not by its views on social justice and personal freedoms, but by how uncritically it viewed American institutions. Questions which probed voter attitudes about the efficacy and worth of government activity, as well as questions which measured trust and confidence in business, revealed that young people held less critical views than their elders in each area. Further, young people no longer led the country in criticism of its Presidents.

OPINION OF BUSINESS

	18-30	30 and older
Highly critical of business for: profitability, lack of social responsibility and for being too powerful	19	28
Moderately critical	22	25
	41	53

OPINION OF GOVERNMENT

	18-30	30 and older
Highly critical of government for being inefficient, too powerful and not benefiting people	12	28
Moderately critical	22	26
	34	54

OPINION OF RONALD REAGAN'S PLACE IN HISTORY

(Gallup - December 1988)

	18-30	30 and older
Reagan will go down in history as:		
An outstanding or above average president	70	56

The survey illustrated that while today's young people are far more disposed to the GOP than were their counterparts decades ago, they are in political neutral on many issues. "Upbeats," who gave Bush nearly 80% of their vote, were young people optimistic about the future, patriotic about their country, and generally poorly informed about issues or politics. Nor did these "Reebok" Republicans show the economic or social conservatism of other core Republican groups.

And so it is today. 18-30 year olds tilt toward the Republicans, but their views on issues from abortion to gun control tend to be moderate and lightly drawn. If anything, it is middle-aged and older people who tend to hold stronger views on today's issues. For example, environmentalism, which was first brought into national focus by the young 25 years ago, today doesn't draw the young as much as it does older people. In 1989, Gallup found only 31% of those under 30 saying they were strong environmentalists, compared with 49% of those 50 and older.

With less knowledge and less political commitment, the youngest element of the electorate may become an easy target of opportunity for those seeking to manipulate public opinion. The 1987 Times Mirror survey found 60% of those under 30 saying that they often did not become aware of candidates until they saw advertisements on television. Only 50% of older people said that. Even more dramatically, while differences in educational status were clearly linked to political awareness within older populations, this is not the case among young Americans.

Among older college-educated people, just 26% said their first exposure to candidates came through television commercials, compared with 57% among the less well-educated. Among the young, majorities of all educational groups were likely to be introduced to candidates for public office by watching their commercials on television.

The 30-second commercial spot is a particularly appropriate medium for the MTV generation. At the conclusion of the 1988 presidential campaign, Times Mirror's research showed that young voters, who began the campaign knowing less than older voters, were every bit as likely to recall advertised political themes such as pollution in Boston Harbor, Willie Horton, and the flag.

Sound-bites and symbolism, the principal fuel of modern political campaigns, are well-suited to young voters who know less and have limited interest in politics and public policy. Their limited appetites and aptitudes are shaping the practice of politics and the nature of our democracy.

# # # #

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TABLES

NEWS MEDIA USAGE BY AGE

Times Mirror Nationwide Surveys

		Age		
	Nationwide	18-30	30-49	50 and older
Reads a daily newspaper	52	37	49	64
Watches TV news regularly	73	62	69	83
Listens to radio news regularly	46	43	50	44

MEDIA PREFERENCE BY AGE

Times Mirror Nationwide Surveys

(Percent who reported being "regular" readers or viewers)

	18-30	30-49	50 and older	Nationwide
Print:				
News magazines such as Time, U.S. News & World Report or Newsweek	18	16	17	17
Personality magazines such as People or US	12	8	5	8
The National Enquirer, The Sun or The Star	8	5	8	6
Business magazines such as Fortune or Forbes	5	5	3	4
Magazines such as The Atlantic, Harpers or The New Yorker	2	2	3	2
Electronic:				
News magazine shows such as 60 Minutes or 20/20	32	38	51	41
Cable News Network (CNN)	21	25	25	24
A Current Affair	21	16	17	17
Entertainment Tonight	14	11	13	12
Sunday morning news shows such as Meet the Press, Face The Nation or This Week with David Brinkley	7	9	17	11
Programs on National Public Radio such as Morning Edition or All Things Considered	5	8	6	6
MacNeil Lehrer	2	4	9	6
Number of interviews	(831)	(1588)	(1212)	(3678)